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ABSTRACT

Despite the belief fostered by the media that religion has been removed from the public schools by recent Supreme Court decisions, these decisions have only removed the teaching of sectarian beliefs, not teaching about religion. Educators have not, generally, responded in a creative manner to the opportunity to teach about religion. Instead, the tendency has been to ignore religion. Educators have responded more positively to the need for teaching values but they have been criticized for not teaching values with a distinctly religious orientation. Public school officials must not capitulate to the strident voices of deeply committed parents holding to a tradition which represents only a single aspect of American pluralism. On the other hand, they cannot ignore these voices, diverse as they are among themselves. In the dialogue between themselves and their critics, perhaps educators must come to a clearer view of the responsibilities of the public schools in the teaching of civic values in relation to those who want their children to be taught a particular set of religious values. The basis for such a new policy is a clear recognition of the civic responsibilities of the public schools in relation to religious responsibilities of the family and to the religious institutions. (IS)

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VALUES THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS CAN TEACH!

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VALUES THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS CAN TEACH!

One of the current criticisms of public education in the United States is that many schools are in danger of setting up "secular humanism" as an "established religion." Indeed, some say that this has already been done through the teaching of human values by such approaches as Values Clarification. Like any such criticism, it is necessary for public school officials to evaluate the practices to which the criticism is directed.

Three terms require definition: "secular," "humanism," and "value." "Secular" is used in different ways but is often defined as a concern for immediate ends and values rather than ultimate ones; that is, secularism, according to the dictionary, refers to "a system of social ethics based upon a doctrine that ethical standards and conduct should be determined exclusively with reference to the present life and social well-being without reference to religion." "Humanism" is defined in a similar way as indicating "a doctrine, set of attitudes, or way of life centered upon human interests and values. . ." (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977 edition). When the two words are combined, they refer to a concern for values and conduct that enhance the welfare of humanity without reference to God. Other words combined with humanism change the meaning--for example, "Christian humanism" refers to a concern for human values in relation to God as understood through Jesus Christ, and "Jewish humanism" is a concern for human values in relationship to God as known through Torah and the prophets. "Value" refers to that which is considered worthwhile and important. When used in teaching, it often--but not necessarily--

signifies moral standards and norms. "Values Clarification" is a process for helping persons identify, clarify, and internalize (live by) values which they already hold.

Before proceeding further, it should be noted that the present situation in public education has been reached through a combination of forces that have been at work for two centuries. The original American experiment in public education in seventeenth and eighteenth century New England was church-controlled. Some of the colonies were founded on the principle of separation of church and state, but it was only in the late eighteenth century that separation became the common practice for the new nation. The principle was written into the "Bill of Rights" of the Constitution to the effect that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The rights secured by the First Amendment were later extended by the Fourteenth Amendment to include state responsibility for upholding them.

Increasingly in the nineteenth century, diversity of religious belief and affiliation became common. The founding fathers--such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin--were religious but not orthodox Christians, and it is probable that they did not intend all religious ideas to be excluded from public education. Problems soon developed, however, concerning what kind of religious teaching to include. When Horace Mann drew up a kind of "religious syllabus" in 1837 to replace the sectarian teaching then characteristic of Massachusetts' schools, his summary was rejected because Orthodox Protestants considered it Unitarian. No permanent solution was found, and generally public school systems did what the community desired. Public education in the late nineteenth century

was still so predominantly Protestant that the Roman Catholic parochial school movement was launched in reaction to this Protestant bias.

Throughout the nineteenth century and increasingly in the twentieth, two things occurred: the secularization of life and increased diversity in religious affiliation and belief. Because many educators recognized the need for values as a part of education, they sought to provide a "neutral" kind of value education. Among those concerned was John Dewey, but Dewey had his biases as much as orthodox Christians and Jews have, and the humanistic view he advocated became for him a religion. For Dewey values arose out of the democratic process; they were not fixed; and they changed as life changed. Although both Dewey's humanism and that of many educators, philosophers, and public leaders since Dewey were usually close to basic Christian values, the values received their warrant from--or had their basis in--human community, sometimes with reference to God, sometimes not.

What developed, beginning with the founding fathers and continuing throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was what Robert Bellah[1] has called civil religion. Like many social scientists, Bellah believes that a culture cannot survive without religion. He recognizes that no one organized religion has been accepted for the United States but finds a general religion existing alongside the others. Civil religion includes such elements as belief in a Creator God, doing good for others, and the special destiny of the United States under God. He quotes among others Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln (the chief "theologian" of civil religion), John Kennedy, and, in a later article, Richard Nixon. Many elements that he and others have found in civil religion are derived from the Jewish-Christian heritage, but other more distinctive beliefs of those faiths are not included.

In response to secularization and religious diversity, along with the accompanying development of civil religion, the public schools increasingly became independent from organized religion. Secularization of public education increased in the twentieth century and was consummate by a number of Supreme and State Court decisions, especially in the 1960's.

These decisions, it should be noted, were not made at the initiative of the courts as a deliberate effort to foster secularization of public education, but rather in response to those who believed their civil rights were being violated by sectarian teaching or practice. The decisions, of course, were based on the First Amendment as applied to the states by the Fourteenth.

The court decisions have been aimed toward sectarian religious teaching and practice; that is, the fostering of a particular interpretation of religion, not toward teaching about religion. It is not quite true, as the media made it look, that God was removed from public schools. The 1963 Abington v. Schempp and Murray v. Curlett decisions specifically advocated the inclusion of non-sectarian religious teaching. Justice Clark's majority opinion included these words: ". . . one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities." (374 U.S. 225) And Justice Brennan added his concurring opinion:

> The holding of the Court today plainly does not foreclose teaching about the Holy Scriptures or about the differences between religious sects in classes in literature or history. Indeed, whether or not the Bible is involved, it would be impossible to teach meaningfully many subjects in the social sciences or the humanities without some mention of religion. To what extent, and at what points in the curriculum religious

> materials should be cited, are matters which the court ought to entrust very largely to the experienced officials who superintend our Nation's public schools. (374 U.S. 307)

Educators generally have not responded in a creative manner to this provision, however, in spite of a great amount of study of it in the late 1960's and 1970's. The tendency has often been for educators and textbook publishers to ignore religion. One text in American history, for example, in a description of life in Colonial New England, simply omitted Sunday altogether!

On the other hand, educators have responded more positively to the need for including value teaching in education but have been criticized because values were not taught with a distinctly religious orientation. Recently, this teaching has often been done through the use of a method worked out by Louis Raths in the mid-1960's and called "Values Clarification." The purpose of this technique is not to teach values as such but to help students understand, clarify, and internalize the values they have acquired, or might acquire, elsewhere. Teaching is carried out through the use of "strategies" which require choices by participants regarding various human questions.[2]

The issues raised by those opposed to "secular humanism" in the schools is, as even this brief survey indicates, are exceedingly complex ones. The problem is made more difficult by misunderstandings on both sides and by the unwillingness of critics to discuss rationally and calmly both the problem and possible solutions. The four propositions which follow appear to be necessary assumptions for engaging in a rational discussion.

1. Most educators agree that there is no value-free education. Since a "value" is what a person considers of importance, even the assumption that all children and youth should receive at least minimum education is a value. Curriculum choices represent values. What is included in a textbook and what a teacher emphasizes in the classroom and on assignments are based partly on values. The insistence on honesty in doing assignments is a moral value. Where values are generally accepted (honesty, for example), no problem arises. Where there are conflicting moral values (with regard to sexual conduct, for example), serious problems often arise.

2. It is impossible for a school system not to reflect a value system. Milton Rokeach, a highly respected social scientist who has made a specialty out of studying values, writes that "there is a reasonably good consensus among sociologists that the most distinctive property or defining characteristic of a social institution is its values."[3] Those who insist that the schools must do "factual" teaching represent a system of education with one set of values; those who support a broader curriculum represent another. Suppose one accepts the former: what facts are to be taught? One set of problems is thereby substituted for another. Is the scientific view of the gradual development of the solar system, the earth, and human life a "fact" to be taught? And what about the Genesis account of creation? Should both of these approaches be taught as science, or is the latter theology? If biology is taught factually, what should be included in teaching about human reproduction? Do we ignore facts about teen-age pregnancy, venereal disease, and other sex problems, or include them? And the list of conflicts could be multiplied to form a book on curriculum theory!

The kind of curriculum (factual or broader) and what should be taught are both dependent on value systems, some of which are conflicting. So is the way in which the life of a school is carried out: how much time is allowed for extra-curricular activities including athletics, policies regarding the relationship of different ethnic groups, and a host of other matters. Values are involved in a school system whether one likes it or not.

3. If the schools do not help some children and young people in value formation, no one else will. It is not that parents reflect no values; it is, rather, that some--perhaps many--do not help in the formation of a conscious value system. The schools, to be sure, should not impose a religious value system. Does this mean also that, by means such as Values Clarification, they can do nothing to help young people choose their own in the light of their background and their present religious or lack of religious affiliation?

American society, for better or worse, has turned more and more responsibilities over to the schools. Perhaps it is time for educators to begin to question the extended roles given to them. But what will happen to many children if the schools refuse to accept the responsibility for transmitting cultural civic values? However inadequate from an orthodox religious point of view the value teaching of public schools is, it may be an important force which prevents chaos in American culture. Surely civic values for society and for acceptable human relations, are better than no values at all! This is not to say that civic values can or should be used as a substitute for one's personal religion.

4. It is also clear, on the basis of the First Amendment and the pluralism of American society, that no single traditional religious system can be taught in the public schools. Suppose by majority vote it was decided that the position of Roman Catholicism, or that of evangelical Protestantism, or that of liberal Protestantism would be the norm. What would happen? The excluded groups would demand their rights also. A pluralistic kind of teaching can be carried out--the kind that both Justices White and Brennan supported in the Abington decision. If this option is chosen, teachers must be prepared to represent fairly the perspectives of various groups. Further, with the influx of religions other than the Jewish and the Christian, the options to be presented have increased and will doubtless continue to do so.

Is there a solution to the dilemma in which we find ourselves? There is probably no one answer, but there are answers, and individuals should be free to accept one or more of these for themselves and their children.

1. One proposal, as has been stated, is to limit what the schools do to "factual teaching." There is enough truth in the condition which calls forth this proposal that it cannot be ignored. The schools have been asked to do too much. John Holt concluded some years ago that if all children were given the broad learning opportunities which 20 percent of the children in the United States were then receiving in schools with an "expanded curriculum," the cost would be so high that the public would not accept the expense of such education.[4] And this was in a time prior to the current rate of inflation and the demands for tax reduction!

Having accepted the need for more emphasis on the "essentials," however, it does not seem possible to limit schools to "factual teaching"

unless they return to the teaching of the three "R's"--reading (without comment or discussion), 'riting, and 'rithmetic. This drastic a curtailment of the content of schooling does not seem likely in spite of those who, like Ivan Illych, have advocated the "deschooling of society."[5] How can literature and history be taught without some attention to values? Should all conversation between student and teacher and student and student be eliminated? In this day of growing computerized information--some valuable, some insignificant--the teacher and student must develop critical judgment, a crucial educational value. The current distinction between "essentials in curriculum" as required, and as many optional elements of enrichment as a local school district desires and can afford, is probably a good one. It does not seem realistic to suggest that only "facts" be taught, however.

2. A more viable option is the increasing trend for religious groups to establish their own schools. As has been pointed out, this is what Roman Catholics did beginning in the late nineteenth century through the parochial school system. Some critics of this option say that a pluralistic educational system will undermine public education. In a "melting pot" society it might have been so, but the "melting pot" concept is no longer accepted as the norm for American society. Cultural diversity, including religious diversity, is a much more common philosophy today. The European and British systems of public education, where public funds are provided for private schools under stated conditions, have not been destroyed by private schools. Whether public funds ought to be used for sectarian education in the United States is another question. The existence of such schools in a pluralistic society, however, is part of the solution to the educational dilemma.

3. Teaching ABOUT all religions, including their value systems, is also a live option for the public school. The authors have already noted that this kind of teaching of religion has not only been allowed but positively affirmed by the courts. It has also been indicated that not much has been done to implement it.

Increasingly, the range of religious ideas and values will have to be expanded beyond those of Jewish and Christian groups. Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, along with cult groups that are offsprings of Christianity, will need to be included. This places a great burden on teachers who will need to receive special preparation for this work. The use of resource persons from the community, however, will help relieve teachers from the burden of excessive preparation. Such teaching must not be for the purpose of proselyting but in order to present the various religions as part of the diverse cultural background and of the present reality of American society.

4. The public school can and should teach CIVIC values; the home and the religious institutions build on this base, modifying it if necessary, as they teach religious values.

The word "civic" is used as a more neutral word than either "secular" or "humanistic." Civic values are those attributes of character necessary for good citizenship. They are qualities of personal life and interpersonal relationships necessary for a society to survive--that which is necessary for maintaining the common good. It may be that today's society has become not only diverse but divisive, and that it may not survive as a united society. Nevertheless, a publicly supported civic agency, such as the public school system, cannot avoid, regardless of those who are critical of its efforts, its responsibility for teaching the values understood as

necessary for the preservation of its civilization. In doing this kind of teaching, the school should make quite clear that what it teaches is not a substitute for religion but rather the basis for citizenship.

For homogeneous societies--those without diversity--religion usually serves as the basis for cohesiveness. Only when religion and the common good are so inextricably intertwined that they cannot be separated, however, can religion be the cohesive force. In the Hebrew Scriptures (the Christian Old Testament) there is no word for religion, for obedience to God was identified with life, not just with a set of beliefs and practices. In the later New Testament writings the word "religion" was introduced--as Christians came into closer contact with a pagan society that they rejected. This contrast can be seen in two similar but quite differently identified biblical summaries of the response to God required by the individual. Micah, the eighth century Hebrew prophet, introduces his summary of the faith response with these words: "What does the Lord require of you. . ." (Micah 6:8). James, a New Testament writer, on the other hand, introduces his summary of the faith response with the words: "Religion, that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father, is this. . . ." (James 1:27). This difference represents the contrast between a society in which faith was intertwined with the whole of culture and one in which of necessity there was some separation between the two.

The present day situation is a replication of that which James, not Micah, faced: the faith response can no longer be identified with the civic response. The two are related, of course, and the person of faith is called to respond as a person of faith in all of life. But there are also civic responsibilities, and the response of the person of no faith,

or of faiths different from one's own, must be taken into account by all persons involved in a non-totalitarian state. The Christian--and in some way all religious persons--must then work out the implications of Jesus' statement as recorded in Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, and Luke 20:25: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." It is not always easy to decide where to draw the line between the two, but at times it has to be done.

Nor is it easy to determine the civic values on which there is either consensus or enough agreement for them to be included in public school teaching. Milton Rokeach, who has been quoted previously, has identified 18 "terminal values" and 18 "instrumental values" as those on which he has based his value studies. "Terminal values" are those things for which one aims; "instrumental values" are qualities which help toward the attainment of the "terminal values."[6] Rokeach has identified four in each group which have been most highly regarded as "educational values." The terminal list consists of a sense of accomplishment, self-respect, wisdom, and freedom, and the instrumental list, responsible, capable, broadminded, and intellectual. It is likely that this list would need to be modified by many school systems. In any case, a list of civic values consciously chosen by a school system with the end of developing good citizenship, however short or extensive it may turn out to be, is the first step in that system's teaching of civic values.

Teaching civic values should accomplish at least two purposes. (1) There are many children and youth who do not participate in religious groups or are not consciously taught values by their parents. Many religious people will not think that what the schools do is adequate. It will

at least be better than no teaching at all, and it will provide a basis for good citizenship. (2) The teaching of such values will also provide a foundation on which the religious groups and families can build. There is at least some transfer of training when the elements of two learning activities are identical or even similar. The process of learning values in a non-religious setting is at least similar to that of a religious situation. Motivation--or the reasons for a particular kind of conduct--is obviously not the same; the process of learning at least has interconnections. Further, those who acquire good citizenship, at least with regard to many values, have learned conduct which is also considered important by religious groups.

Where then will the religious values be taught? It must be in religious institutions (churches, synagogues, etc.) and the home. This is how the early church operated in a Roman, pagan society, and there are many parallels between Roman society and contemporary American society. During the Middle Ages--that long period beginning with the Emperor Constantine and concluding with the flowering of the Renaissance--civic and Christian values were virtually synonymous. There are persons who appear to want to return to such a situation through the passing of legislation or the amending of the Constitution so as to incorporate particular Christian values in public school teaching. To do so would mean the return to a repressive central government and the end of a democratic society.

Some people believe that children and youth must be protected from the diversity of American society, and will seek to do so through the establishment of private schools. Those who believe that children who grow up to be adults in American society ought to be confronted with diversity prior to

adulthood will choose another option. The experience of the church during its first three centuries can be of help to them: the accepting of responsibility by religious institutions and the family for teaching specific religious values while welcoming whatever help the schools and other public institutions could do through the teaching of civic values.

For reasons which are not fully understood, the church during its first two and one-half centuries did not establish many Christian schools; instead they usually sent their children to Roman schools. There must have been aspects of such education which Christians rejected, but they did so without rejecting the schools themselves. Christians even taught in the Roman schools, and their witness, silent though it usually was, became a part of the overall influence of the schools. When the Roman empire disintegrated, the schools disappeared; and the church, now the arbiter of culture, did little to replace them. How much this failure to establish schools in a new setting is responsible for the so-called "dark ages" can only be surmised.

Public school officials must not capitulate to the strident voices of deeply committed parents holding to a tradition which represents only a single aspect of American pluralism. On the other hand, they cannot ignore these voices, diverse as they are among themselves. Moral chaos is too deep and too common in contemporary culture for educators not to be concerned. In the dialogue between themselves and their critics, perhaps educators must come to a clearer view of the responsibilities of the public schools in the teaching of civic values in relation to those who want their children to be taught a particular set of religious values. The basis for such a new policy is a clear recognition of the civic

responsibilities of the public schools in relation to the religious responsibilities of the family and the religious institutions.

Footnotes

[1]Bellah's seminal article, "Civil Religion in American," first appeared in Daedalus, Winter 1967, and was reprinted in American Civil Religion, eds. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (Harper and Row, 1974). See also Bellah's The Broken Covenant (Seabury Press, 1975).

[2]The basic description of this approach is found in Values and Teaching, by Louis Raths, Merrill Harmon, and Sidney B. Simon (Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1966). The first book of strategies, to which many others have been added, is Values Clarification, by Sidney B. Simon, Leland W. Howe, and Howard Kirschenbaum (Hart Publishing Company, Inc., 1972). A third useful book is Readings in Values Clarification, eds. Sidney B. Simon and Howard Kirschenbaum (Winston Press, Inc., 1973).

[3]Milton Rokeach, Understanding Human Values (The Free Press: A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), p. 51.

[4]Freedom and Beyond (A Delta Book, 1972), pp. 118-22.

[5]Deschooling Society (Harper and Row, 1970).

[6]Rokeach's entire list includes both the religious and non-religious; for example, it contains "salvation" as a terminal value, which, he has found, is identified by his religiously oriented respondents as important. The instrumental values, "being loving" and "being helpful" are not restricted to persons who consider themselves religious, however, while "being forgiving" is favored by them. See Milton Rokeach, op. cit., 262-3. See also especially Chapters 3 and 16.

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